

## MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

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## 9. BREEDING OF THE MALLARD (*ANSER PLATYRHYNCHOS*) IN NEPAL

The HANDBOOK Vol. I, p. 162 states that a large proportion of the Mallard visiting the subcontinent in the winter come from Siberia. This duck also (now) breeds in "very small numbers" on the Kashmir lakes. In the Birds of Nepal (1976) the Flemings write (p. 38) "Thought to nest on Titi Lake (South of the Nilgiri peaks of Annapurna)".

In May/June 1977 I was able to confirm this conjecture with actual sight records.

The Titi lake is situated in north central Nepal (28° 38' N, 83° 37' E) at a height of 2622 metres (8600 feet) in a bend on the east side of the Kaligandaki, about 2½ Km. from that river. At its nearest point the Chinese Tibetan border is 45 Km. away. The situation is spectacular with the main peak of Dhaulagiri (8169 m) towering above the lake to the north west. The lake is quite small, very roughly 300 metres long by 200 broad, mostly thickly covered with grass and water plants: less than half consists of clear water, indeed just a "duck pond".

I first visited Titi from 30 April to 2 May 1977. At this time of the year the main spring migration from the subcontinent to the north has passed over the Himalayas, although some stragglers may remain until the end of May. There were five Mallard on the lake, one pair and three apparently unattached males. It was not unreasonable to speculate that three females might be sitting in the thick cover, but we caught no sight of them over the three days. The local people assured us that numerous Mallard did indeed nest and breed there. (Also that they did not molest the birds—apparently, and fortunately for the Mallard, the shooting of one some years ago had been followed within hours by a hail storm which caused considerable devastation!)

Roughly 6 weeks later, from 11 to 13 June, I sent one of my Nepalese boys to look at the lake again. This young man had been with me in May, and on other expeditions into the mountains. He has worked on our farm in Pokhara, where we breed Mallard. I consi-

der his testimony completely reliable. On this visit he counted eleven females and seven males. As far as he could estimate, there were twenty five ducklings about 2 weeks old, the property of three or four mothers. Each evening the drakes flighted to the nearby Kaligandaki river, returning in the very early morning. All the females were visible most of the day, indicating that nesting was over, but not precluding the possibility of some additional females sitting unseen in the thick cover.

It is fascinating to speculate, with other known breeding places 1000 Km to the north west and 2-3000 km to north, how this population of breeding Mallard became, apparently, fully established on such a small lake. Admittedly Titi does lie immediately on a known (but probably not major) migration route along the line of the Kaligandaki river. Considering that the lake lies just two hours off a main trade route, it is not impossible that an examination of other small lakes in remoter areas might yield interesting results. Rare at 2987 m in N.W. Nepal, the largest lake in Nepal, is an obvious candidate for investigation at the correct time of year, but it lacks cover for nesting. This might be established and it would be an interesting experiment, in this National Park, to discover if duck could be induced to breed there by the introduction

of natural food and cover plants.

It would also be interesting to learn the true extent of the "very small numbers" breeding in Kashmir, why the numbers have declined, and whether anything can be done to increase them.

In addition to the Mallard, we can record this year the first (apparently) properly authenticated sight record of the Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) breeding in Nepal, indeed in the subcontinent outside Ladakh. The HANDBOOK mentions the Everest region as a strong possibility and the Flemings, the Manangbhot Valley.

Almost certainly the "Brahminy" breeds in both these localities, but our sight record is by Mr. H. S. Nepali (Kaji) of Kathmandu who saw ducklings near the source of the Kaligandaki, about 6 km from the Tibetan border, in June 1977.

Apart from the strictly resident species, the only other normally migratory duck known to nest south of Ladakh and Tibet seem to be the Marbled Teal (in Pakistan) and White-eyed Pochard (in Kashmir). The discovery of the Mallard nesting far to the south of its former limits prompts the question whether a good food supply and congenial surroundings may be more important than longer hours of daylight. However, the Mallard is probably the most adaptable of all ducks.

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